

# Newsletter

July 1982 No. 27

Blissymbolics  
Communication  
Institute





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## BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE

The purpose of this Newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning Blissymbolics which utilizes visual symbols as an augmentative to communication. The many applications of Blissymbolics include the following:

1. Communication Difficulties
2. Cognitive and Language Development
3. Reading
4. International Communication

SUBSCRIPTIONS: The Newsletter, Bulletin and Resource Directory are available from the BCI for a combined yearly fee of \$30.00. Apply to:

Blissymbolics Communication Institute  
350 Rumsey Road  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada, M4G 1R8

ARTICLES: Readers are encouraged to contribute letters and articles in order to share their symbol experiences. Write to:

BCI Newsletter  
Mrs. Barbara Rush  
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64 Magnolia Drive  
Hamilton, Ontario  
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FROM THE EDITOROVERVIEW

This issue has a distinct New York flavour since it is spearheaded by the Resource Centre operated by the Association for the Help of Retarded Children, Suffolk County, New York. Susan J. Sansone, Director of the Resource Centre, has gathered eight articles concerning Blissymbolics. Thank you, Susan and colleagues for this generous contribution.

Penny Parnes has submitted a response to a previous article related to initial Blissymbol lexicons. We encourage further dialogue on this topic.

It is always a delight to hear from one of our most faithful contributors, Jane Green. Jane delineates the 'alien territory' into which the symbol user is often thrust.

R. Alan Currie and the Greater Victoria Society for Alternate Communication continue to share their symbol experiences with us. The current article offers interesting information on two new displays.

Many of our readers will have received copies of "The Christmas Story" by Paul Theriault. You will find the story behind this book to be of equal interest.

The Tulsa Nonvocal Communication Resource Centre recently became a BCI affiliate. Mary Losoncy provides information on the Centre's services.

We conclude with the Symbol Users' Corner. Children and teachers from the Ottawa Crippled Children's Centre share one of their symbol/language activities with us.

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PENPAL WANTED

Andrea Straith has requested a penpal for one of her clients. She writes ...

"Carol is a 27 year old woman with cerebral palsy. She has over 200 symbols on her Blissboard, and uses 3-4 word constructions in Blissymbols. She also reads written/printed words quite well. Carol is involved in Special Olympics, in bowling, throwing and wheelchair events. She attends a sheltered workshop where she participates in weaving projects. Carol is an avid sports fan and watches many televised basketball and football games, particularly those involving Purdue University teams. Although Carol does not write due to motor limitations, her mother has agreed to write Carol's dictated messages. Carol and her mother would like the penpal to be another woman with similar interests and communication skills."

If you know a symbol user who could be matched with Carol, please write to

Andrea Straith  
Speech and Hearing Clinic  
Heavilon Hall, Purdue University  
West Lafayette, Indiana, 47907

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The next issue will be published in November 1982. Deadline for receipt of articles and letters is September 15th.

Barbara Rush  
Editor



The Association for the Help of Retarded Children (AHRC) is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for people who are mentally retarded. The Suffolk County Chapter, founded in 1949, provides children's services, adult services, clinical services, community residences and much more to over 2,000 Suffolk families each year.

It costs more than six-million dollars every year to operate AHRC centers and to continue our special programs. Some of these funds are generated through the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the Suffolk County Department of Health Services and United Way. We rely on contributions, donations and membership dues to provide the remaining funds.

The A.H.R.C. Blissymbolics Resource Centre is approaching its second anniversary.

We are fortunate to have two active volunteers, Eileen McGaw and Wilma Diamond in our Blissymbolics Resource Centre. Both exemplify the voluntary effort that has kept centres afloat. Our centre, similar to those all over the world has limited staff, time and funds. It is worldwide volunteerism, dedicated people, performing above and beyond the call of duty that have carried the message of the Blissymbolic "Break-through".

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#### BOSS BOARDS

By: Katie Becker  
Sue Giglio  
Workshop Instructors

The clients in our instruction group are virtually non-verbal. They use alternate communication systems, such as Blissymbolics, Rebus, combinations of these two systems, and sign language. In an attempt to maintain and reinforce what speech therapists have taught the clients, we request that they use their boards and/or manual signs during the day.

In order to stimulate communication, we have begun using "Boss Boards". Basic Blissymbols and Rebus pictures are organized on our boards in the same fashion as our clients' boards. The colors of the stamps are coordinated with the clients' for easy recognition. Now when we say "Do your work" or "Break Time", for example, we accompany the words with pointing to the appropriate symbols/pictures on our own boards. We hope that in this way our clients will begin to generalize their knowledge of the systems and use the systems more frequently.

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BLISSYMBOLICS RESOURCE CENTRE

A SPECIAL PROJECT

By: Susan J. Sansone, Director  
Blissymbolics Resource Centre

As director of AHRC's Blissymbolics Resource Centre, I was recently invited to participate in Brotherhood Week at the Elwood Junior High School in Huntington, New York. The Elwood Foreign Language Department sponsored a two-day program regarding the use of Blissymbolics with the multi-handicapped and mentally retarded. The program had three major purposes: (1) to acquaint the students with Blissymbols, (2) to illustrate the international scope of the system, and (3) to explore the students' attitudes about handicapped individuals.

During the first day of the program approximately 500 foreign language students viewed the 40-minute film "The Breakthrough". This film, which had its premiere showing at the United Nations last May, is a poignant trilogy of three cerebral palsied individual's communication breakthrough via the use of Blissymbols. Although the film deals specifically with cerebral palsied persons, we, at AHRC feel the issues and attitudes dealt with so candidly in the film apply to all handicapped individuals and those who work, live with, and love them.

After the film was shown to the students they were asked to fill out the following questionnaire as a homework assignment.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you feel if you were handicapped?
2. How would you feel about having a handicapped person as a brother or sister?
3. How would you feel about having a handicapped person as your best friend?
4. Why do you feel that a lot of people feel uncomfortable or ill at ease in the company of a handicapped person?  
What could you do to make a handicapped person feel accepted and make others feel comfortable in his/her company?
5. What do you consider to be the most important point of the film?
6. Why do you feel Paul returned to a regular high school when he knew that many of his classmates might not accept him?
7. How do you feel about two handicapped individuals marrying each other?
8. What do you feel is the value of having an international communication system (language) for handicapped individuals?

Approximately two hundred and seventy-five young people responded. Their responses were frank and mature.



On the second day of the workshop the students learned about Blissymbols and enjoyed an exercise where they guessed symbol meanings. I showed them how symbols could be combined to express their favorite soap opera, TV stars and sport teams. Many students left with "The Guiding Light", "General Hospital", and "The Islanders" hockey team written on books, scraps of paper - even the backs of their hands in Blissymbols.

The students discussed the feelings and attitudes evoked by the film "The Breakthrough". They explored their feelings about handicapped people and the possibility of becoming handicapped themselves. The two day program was tremendously successful.

When asked to write a composition on Brotherhood Week for their English class, several students chose to write about the Blissymbolic portion of the program. The following are excerpts from some of these compositions.

"Whenever I used to see a disabled person I always felt sorry for him but it never went further than feeling sorry. Now that I've learned more about the issue, I feel like reaching out and being their friend. Saying I feel bad for you doesn't mean much to a person but everyone needs a friend". (Deborah Lingem)

"The presentation that I saw dealt with the universal language of the handicapped. All of the language classes learned some of the symbols used by these people. We learned about different handicaps and to accept these people as they are. Many people are uncomfortable with the handicapped because they don't know much about them. Now that we learned about these "special people" we will no longer be afraid of them. We will find it easier to understand and communicate with them. This presentation showed us the true meaning of Brotherhood". (Robbie Fallbogen)

"The movie taught me a lot about handicapped people that I did not know. It let me understand a little bit about how they feel about themselves, life and other people. I think this presentation taught me the most about Brotherhood itself. It left me with a little knowledge that I shall carry with me my whole life". (Cindy Mandera)

"The next day when I talked with Mrs. Sansone she told me about her profession and the people she works with. This talk was rewarding to me because it helped me in deciding how I'm going to go about my future. Mrs. Sansone made me realize how much I want to work with retarded and handicapped persons". (Jen Adams)

If the attitudes expressed by these young people are nurtured and remain unaltered as they mature into adulthood, there is hope for our handicapped children and adults. They will live amidst us in a caring, tolerant environment free of prejudice and fear.

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## A "BREAKTHROUGH" FOR LONG ISLANDERS

By: Eileen McGaw  
Blissymbolics Resource  
Centre Instructor  
Public Relations Liaison

Four years ago I became very concerned with the need for a formalized communication system for my 6 year old nonverbal, physically and mentally handicapped son. Brian was attending B.O.C.E.S. II Learning Center, a school for the physically handicapped. His communication system consisted of a large board of photographs, and some simple sign language to help him communicate basic needs. Since his vocabulary was broadening with the use of photos, it was felt that a more formal means of visual communication would be effective.

I decided that I would seek out another opinion and advice from a speech therapist in New York City. She directed me to Westchester and then, surprisingly, to Suffolk AHRC in Bohemia, Long Island - in my own backyard! It was at this time that I first met Sue Sansone. I set up an appointment to have Sue meet Brian. At his first session, Brian was introduced to eight Blissymbols. Brian met with Sue once a week, learning symbols and using them on a communication board.

Sue was hosting a Blissymbolic Elementary Workshop that summer and she asked if I might be interested in attending. I did attend, developed an understanding of Blissymbols, and received certification as a Blissymbol instructor.

Following my workshop experience I went to Brian's school and shared what I had learned at the workshop. Brian's school always encouraged me to share new things with the staff. It's their open-mindedness and ability to try new things that makes this B.O.C.E.S. II Learning Center a unique place.

Brian's classroom teacher and speech therapist were encouraged to attend the next workshop. They did and as a result Brian is presently enrolled in a "very special" class at his school. This is a "total communication class". There are 8 to 10 children, a classroom teacher (trained in Bliss and sign language), an aide (who has learned along with the children), a speech therapist and an itinerant sign teacher. Of these 8-10 children (size of class has changed on and off in the past two years) 4 of the 8 are nonverbal. There are also two distinct levels of academic ability in the room. All of the children use sign language and Blissymbols, but in different ways. In addition to the nonverbal using Blissymbols for communication, one youngster who can speak is using Blissymbols as an extra help in his reading book. His knowledge of Blissymbols has enabled him to decode difficult vocabulary words.

Over the past year I have been volunteering as public relations liaison for the Blissymbolics Resource Centre at Suffolk AHRC. I have conducted programs which included the film "The Breakthrough", together with history and information about Blissymbols to administrators, teachers, parents, school children, and numerous community groups on Long Island.



My very first presentation was given during Brotherhood Week at the Elwood Junior High School. Each department sponsored a program relating to Brotherhood. The Foreign Language Department gave us the opportunity to speak about a very special language, the language of the nonverbal person - Blissymbols.

It was a very interesting experience for me, especially when I accompanied Sue to a pre-screening of the film "The Breakthrough" for the administrators and teachers. They were apprehensive and anticipated that the students would react emotionally or adversely to the candor of the film. Deep down, Sue and I felt - kids are sensitive, fair people and given the opportunity to deal with reality they can be mature and understanding - were we ever right! The film was very well received. It was as though for the very first time kids could share their feelings, anxieties and questions relating to handicapped people.

My next presentation was to parents. At a SEPTA (Special Education Parent Teacher Association) meeting, the film "The Breakthrough" was shown. Being a parent of a handicapped youngster and sharing my experiences about my son enabled other parents to relate to me and ask questions about their own handicapped children. One person at the SEPTA meeting was a member of an organization in Nassau County called CACHS (Council of Agencies to Coordinate Homebound Services). As a result of our meeting I was asked to give an orientation program on Blissymbols to that group to include showing "The Breakthrough" film. It seemed that everywhere "The Breakthrough" and I traveled a wonderful feeling and interest for the handicapped blossomed.

I am a parent advocate for my school district's special education programs. At one of our meetings I spoke of the film and some of the new and exciting things that have been accomplished with communication. I thought our district should learn a bit more about Blissymbols. I previewed the film for the district's officials and special education ancillary personnel. Everyone was impressed with the film but, once again, there was some reluctance as to whether school children were ready to know and understand Wendy, Paul and Sue.

It was agreed that the film and presentation on Blissymbols would be used as a part of the health program at our high school. The program was a three day project. There were two teachers each who taught six classes a day. On the first day, all classes of Teacher A saw the film. On the second day, all classes of Teacher B saw the film and I gave a follow-up 45-minute presentation about Blissymbols to Teacher A's classes. The following day I did the follow-up for Teacher B.

It was a very exciting and rewarding experience. I discovered that being a parent initiated numerous questions... How do you accept your child? Is he really different? Do you find less time to do other things? How do your other children relate to him?, and on and on. I usually began my follow-up



by discussing the film. The one reaction I will never forget was when I was told "You have a lot of nerve making me look at a film like that... you really ruined my weekend". I didn't have to give a response, others in the class responded with "You know Walter, we don't get to see or meet these people, but that doesn't mean they aren't around us and that we shouldn't try to understand them". The young people were eager to learn about symbol users and this new means of communication.

The following week arrangements were made for me to do a special workshop for S.O.C.E.S. III. The invitation was sent to diagnostic and prescriptive teachers, speech and hearing teachers, psychologists, teachers of the deaf, school social workers, and building administrators. Everyone attending had previous knowledge about Blissymbols, but none had seen the film nor knew directly of some of the success stories. Hopefully, I helped to open some eyes. Everyone left with new insight about their clients and ideas to be shared with their colleagues.

I am thoroughly enjoying my role as public relations liaison. I feel that I am helping to prepare others to meet handicapped individuals like my own son Brian, who communicate in a new and different way. I hope through my efforts "Long Islanders" have begun to know about and understand Blissymbol users.

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#### THE EFFICACY OF UTILIZING REBUS AS AN ALTERNATE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

By: Steven S. Barsky, M.A.  
Speech Pathologist and  
Barbara G. Ihle, M.A.  
Speech Pathologist

During the last eight months the Rebus system has been adapted for use as an alternate mode of communication at the Suffolk Association for the Help of Retarded Children (AHRC) in Bohemia. In the majority of instances, we have found the Rebus pictographic symbols to be most useful in conjunction with Blissymbolics. There is also a segment of our population for whom these Rebus symbols alone provide the most viable means of communication.

Although many uses have been suggested for Rebus, it was originally developed as a phonetically based reading program. Rebuses are symbols which represent entire words or parts of words. These symbols can be either pictorial or abstract. Since their development, many other uses have been found for these symbols.

Several similarities can be drawn between the Blissymbolics and Rebus systems. For example, both systems can be used as communication devices, incorporate international symbols, and can be utilized to develop language concepts and syntactical skills. In addition, both the Blissymbolics and Rebus systems can be applied, across a wide range of populations (i.e. for the retarded, aphasic, as communication systems for the non-oral, etc.) and can be used to strengthen reading skills. The method of initial teaching for each system is essentially the same. Specific objects or action verbs are generally taught first. Color coding may be used to facilitate accessing of symbols.



Blissymbolics have been in use at this agency for the past three years. While Bliss has demonstrated itself to be highly beneficial in facilitating communication, some problems were encountered when categorical symbols (i.e. food, drink, clothing) were introduced, particularly for those clients who exhibited a visual-perceptual impairment or who function within the severe to profound range of mental retardation. The Blissymbols in these categories are visually similar and have appeared to cause confusion for some clients.

There are certain advantageous qualities inherent in the Rebus symbols. Many of the elementary Rebus symbols are highly concrete line drawings of the concepts they represent. For the visually-perceptually impaired and/or severely to profoundly retarded individual, highly ideographic and/or meaning based Blissymbols are not easily learned or accessed. These symbols apparently are too abstract for a population which requires simplistic pictographic representations. Because Rebus symbols are visually similar to objects/concepts they represent, they therefore require less transitional learning than do many of the Blissymbols which are not so visually representational (i.e. Rebus symbol for milk is a picture of a milk carton; using Blissymbols, it is represented by the compound symbol meaning "drink of life"). When working with individuals who manifest the aforementioned disabilities the environmental familiarity inherent in these Rebus symbols is extremely beneficial in the acquisition of these symbols and the concepts they represent. By substituting the Rebus counterparts for these Blissymbols, we have been able to teach vocabulary and language concepts that these clients were previously lacking.

These Rebuses are used on a communication board exactly as one would utilize Blissymbols (color coding, combination of symbol/written label, Fitzgerald Key grammatical orientation). Thus far, the combination of these two methods has presented no problems for our clients. Vocabulary is learned and sentences are generated with generalization from one mode to the other.

As was previously stated, there is another small segment of our population for whom Rebuses alone are most easily learned. Rebuses were introduced only after attempts to teach Blissymbols and/or signing had been exhausted. For these individuals no amount of color coding or changes in the size of the Blissymbols seemed to facilitate learning. By and large, 1-2 word communications of basic wants and needs seems to be the most appropriate and realistic goal for this group. To-date their success with Rebuses, both large and small, is quite encouraging. For the first time these individuals have, at their disposal, an effective and viable means of expressing themselves.

The implications of this are far reaching. Communicative frustration leading to "acting-out behavior" can now be minimized and self-esteem enriched. The ability to share feelings, ideas and needs with other people is now a reality. They no longer need to rely on others to initiate conversation, or to be passive in a communicative situation. This fosters independence in all areas of daily living, from toileting to ordering their own meals. A means of indicating likes, dislikes, illness and activities is at their disposal.

Whatever the advantages of Rebuses are, they also have some important drawbacks. Where the Blissymbol vocabulary is open-ended (can continually be expanded through the combination of symbols), the Rebus vocabulary is limited. There are only approximately 75-100 symbols which are pictographically concrete and functional enough to be used with our visually impaired and/or severely to profoundly retarded clients. Additionally, the Rebus vocabulary is often inappropriate because of its original intent to improve reading skills rather than develop language concepts. For example, the compound word "cowhand" is depicted in Rebus by pairing the symbols for "cow" and "hand". This, and many concepts in the Rebus system are not communicatively functional for our clients. Furthermore, essential vocabulary is noticeably lacking. Representations such as "cafeteria" and "therapy" do not exist in the Rebus system.

After the original 75-100 pictographic Rebus representations, the system is largely dependent on the combinations of letters and symbols. The phonic based nature of this system can prove confusing for a population which lacks phonetic attack skills. Blissymbolics, on the other hand, is a visual-graphic communication system which is meaning based and does not incorporate phonetic associations. Perhaps that is why the Bliss system can be learned by those people who cannot learn to speak, or read traditional orthography which is sound referenced.

Some Rebus verb forms can lead to confusion, as well. Many of these concepts are represented by a person doing the action (i.e. verb to sit is represented by a stick figure in a chair). This can cause problems when working on syntax

as the confused client may construct the sentence "I boy sitting chair". This dilemma was similarly seen when some clients attempted to generate sentences using the Fokes Sentence Builder.

The size of the Rebuses can also present a problem. By using a larger template, Blissymbols can be made more clear for an individual who demonstrates visual acuity and/or perceptual problems. Our only means of providing large Rebuses is through the use of large stimulus cards. These cards are ideal for carry-over exercises in the classroom or workshop, but are impractical for a board communication system. Large Rebus have proved cumbersome to transport for our clients and, consequently, they are infrequently used outside of the classroom/workshop or therapy situations.

One method we have used in an attempt to circumvent this problem is through the construction of Rebus books. Rebus symbols are arranged categorically and the client is asked to search through the book for the appropriate representation to indicate wants and needs or to answer the therapist's functionality questions. The use of the Rebus book facilitates transportation of the individual's communication system and increases the number of situational opportunities for expressive language use. Problems with this method may be encountered in the areas of object permanence and auditory memory. Accessing of the various symbols may become a problem as the number of pages in the book increases. The client may find it difficult to remember the previously presented verbal label and may not be able to locate the corresponding symbol. As of yet, this has not proven to be a problem.

In conclusion, while the Rebus reading system in its totality is not applicable for our TMR population, the use of the pictographic symbols has been demonstrated to be an effective device for facilitating communication of basic wants and needs for many of our severely to profoundly retarded clients. Used alone or in concert with Blissymbolics, Rebus offers some of our communicatively handicapped mentally retarded adults an additional means of expressing themselves.

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## AN EXCITING "FIRST"

By: Wilma Diamond  
Blissymbolics Resource Centre  
Instructor - Public Relation's  
Liaison

Linda's initial introduction to the raised board was an exciting event for both of us. You can well imagine my excitement as I awaited Linda's reaction to this new experience. She had formerly participated successfully in a preliminary study with sand printed cards. Would she be able to make the transition from the sand printed cards to the new rubber board? Linda's facile fingers felt their way across the sand printed cards with one hand and the raised rubber symbols with the other. I will never forget the lovely smile that spread across Linda's face that signaled her recognition. Comprehension was communicated through use of sign language. The instant of recognition was a highly charged emotional moment with shouts of joy and tears and a lot of hugging and kissing.

Linda has been working successfully with the raised symbol board for about four weeks with an additional one hour reinforcement by her workshop instructor. She really enjoys working with the Blissymbols as she positively jumps out of her seat when I come to take her to her one hour sessions. So far, she has acquired 40 symbols and retained 36. We are anxiously looking forward to the following eight weeks. Our ultimate goal is to improve her communication skills, as most of the people in her environment, both at work and at home, have limited sign language skills.



Fictured here is a deaf-blind client, Linda Napolitano, and her volunteer Blissymbol instructor, Wilma Diamond, using an experimental raised Blissymbol rubberized board which is currently being tested internationally.

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## READING AND THE MENTALLY RETARDED

By: Robert H. Meyer, Ph.D.  
Director  
Psychological Services  
Suffolk AHRC  
Bohemia, New York

In the public school system a great deal of instructional time is spent on teaching educably retarded individuals how to read and in strengthening this ability once it is acquired. The rationale for such emphasis rests on the assumption that this particular academic skill will facilitate the retarded person's adaptive behavior in adulthood, i.e. it will help him better adjust to the demands of adulthood. This rationale is manifested when educators advocate the teaching of reading on the basis that such an ability will enhance the retarded person's "survival skills" and he/she will be capable of reading various types of signs such as "MEN'S ROOM", "DANGER", "POISON", etc. Teaching reading also is an academic goal which is compatible with the "normalization principle" in the sense that the acquisition of this skill by the educably retarded parallels the academic curriculum of "normal" children. When discussing reading programs for the mentally retarded several questions need to be examined: (1) Since a great deal of time is spent on teaching reading to the educable retarded in school, how often do these same individuals use this skill in adulthood? (2) If opportunities to read are limited in adulthood how can we create such opportunities? (3) Given adequate reading ability, what should be the content of the reading material to be read by the intellectually handicapped adult?

The research literature on reading and the mentally retarded primarily focuses on methods and techniques whereby the individual can learn how to read. Usually these methods and techniques are based on establishing a connection or association between the graphic symbol (i.e. the printed word itself) and its sound equivalent. For instance, in the "picture-fading approach" words are taught through association with pictures that are "faded out" over a series of trials. Another technique called "the mnemonitechnic approach" entails identifying an embedded cue word located within the printed word and then supplying the individual with a simple sentence phrase (called a "mediational link") containing both the embedded cue word and the printed word. The individual can then use this sentence phrase as an "associative aid" when attempting to recall the pronunciation of the printed word. The "Ball-Stick-Bird" Reading System is based on the fact that a circle, a line, and an angle are the three basic forms used in constructing the letters of the alphabet. Students build the letters of the alphabet using physical representations of these forms. Via tactile feedback and color coding identifying letters is thus facilitated which, in turn, eventually leads to the reading of words.

Since speech and reading are both forms of communication, the fact that visual symbols (e.g. Blissymbols) have been used to aid handicapped individuals with no functional speech suggests that visual symbols may be equally effective in helping mentally retarded persons learn how to read. The manner in which Blissymbols can be employed as an adjunctive aid in teaching reading is based on the formation of connections or associations. The use of Blissymbols as an



adjunctive aid circumvents the various problems which are encountered in orthographic systems (such as English) where the individual must make letter-sound associations and engage in sound blending.

Several points should be taken into consideration when developing a reading program for the adult mentally retarded which is based on the use of Blissymbols as an adjunctive aid. First, the selection of participants should be based on their intellectual capability. This point rests on the assumption that reading is a symbolic form of communication whereby ideas are exchanged. The individual must have sufficient intellectual capacity to enable him/her to comprehend a certain range of ideas and information in order to justify the reading process. If the individual is severely intellectually limited, the content of the reading material will have to be significantly restricted and limited in order to accommodate such severe cognitive deficits and limited awareness. A second consideration to be taken into account when developing reading programs for the adult mentally retarded using Blissymbols concerns the content of the reading material. As pointed out earlier, the research literature has emphasized techniques of teaching reading with less emphasis given to the reading content. Given mentally retarded adults who possess the necessary intellectual ability and awareness to benefit from reading, one must make decisions about what kinds of reading material will be functionally meaningful and relevant to them. A final consideration concerns the manner in which Blissymbols can be used to augment the reading process. In this sense, Blissymbols may be either used as a temporary or permanent aid. As a temporary aid, Blissymbols would be initially paired with printed words and then slowly faded out so only the printed words remain visible. As a permanent aid, Blissymbols would be permanently paired with printed words in the same way as hearing aids are used as a permanent aid for individuals with hearing loss and eyeglasses are used as a permanent aid for individuals with visual problems.

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BLISSYMBOL READING GROUP

Susan Sansone, M.S.  
Speech Pathologist  
Director  
AHRC Blissymbolics  
Resource Centre

We have been experimenting with Blissymbols as an augmentative to reading with our trainable mentally retarded adults for the past two years at Suffolk Association for the Help of Retarded Children. We initiated the reading program to provide our language impaired clients with the experience of co-articulating words in sentences as well as providing syntax models that could be reviewed over and over again.

Shortly after we began the reading program, it became apparent that a certain cognitive level was needed for individuals to comprehend the ideas and concepts expressed in the stories. Individuals with language ages or mental ages of approximately 5-7 years emerged as those who experienced the most success in utilizing symbols to augment reading skills.

We decided early on in our experiment with Blissymbols as an augmentative that we would not be teaching reading for reading's sake. We specifically developed reading materials that were functional and relevant to the clients. Blissymbols allowed us to introduce sophisticated words and concepts early on in the reading program, as we were not bound by the more simplified vocabulary found in traditional phonetic or sight reading approaches. The reading group's topics included current events, client news, holiday stories, historical events, e.g. "The First Man To Walk On The Moon", instructional material, e.g. "How to Plant Flowers and Vegetables", poems and stories - just for fun.

Some of our clients will be capable of transferring over to traditional orthography through symbol fading techniques. However, for most of the clients, Blissymbols will remain their only viable medium for reading. We are just beginning to realize the monumental task ahead in providing our population with appropriate reading materials. But - provide it we must because of the growth seen, the joy expressed and the self-esteem gained by their new ability to read.

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Penny Parnes, Director, Augmentative Communication Service  
Toronto, Ontario

We at the Augmentative Communication Service and Blissymbolics Communication Institute read Cathy Perlich's article, entitled "Initial Blissymbol Lexicons" with concern. We were disappointed that the materials and approach (meeting the child's needs) could have been misinterpreted, when it was evident that much time and effort had been given to the critique. The work rests on several mistaken premises. On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I am responding.

At the heart of the issue is Perlich's out-of-date information regarding Blissymbolic materials. In an article otherwise sprinkled with current and well-researched quotes, the information central to the article (i.e., Blissymbol flashcard vocabulary) is dated. Perlich bases her critique on the Blissymbol vocabulary of 30 flashcards. This initial vocabulary was replaced in early 1978 with much more extensive vocabulary of 250 flashcards. Accompanying this was a paper documenting models of symbol instruction and giving strategies for vocabulary selection:

"Vocabulary was selected for the flashcards with the hopes of meeting the need of as great a number of symbol users and instructors as was possible. To accomplish this, reference was made to the three models of symbol application, and symbols which would be appropriate to each of the models, were chosen." (Parnes, 1980)

Bases for selection of the 250 vocabulary items included:

- reports of various symbol instructors (Handbook of Blissymbolics, 1978)
- 100, 200, 400 standard vocabularies (BCF, 1974)
- early vocabulary language development (Bloom & Lahey, 1978; Holland, 1975; McDonald & Blott, 1974; Ford, 1979)
- reports of instructors of low-functioning mentally retarded students (BCF, 1977)

Perlich also critiques a sequential order for introduction of the 30 symbol items which she attributes to the BCI. Any suggestions regarding sequential introduction of symbols are quoted as coming from the Handbook of Blissymbolics, 1978. This publication delineates a great many approaches to vocabulary introduction as they were reported by the instructors who contributed to the "Formative Evaluation Study, 1974-1975". Indeed these suggestions were collected from instructors in over 20 clinical settings.

The preface to the Handbook of Blissymbolics, 1978 states:

"Due to the very formative state of the art, it still remains with each instructor to draw on clinical experience, knowledge of instructional principles and intuitive awareness of the symbol user's needs in order to apply Blissymbolics successfully in individual situations." (Pg. 3)

Much of Perlich's argument is based on a comparison with normal language development. While those of us working in the field of Blissymbolics must take cognisance of the field of normal language development, we must also be extremely cautious in trying to parallel it. The communicative needs and experiences of the non-speaking individual are frequently very different from those of the individual developing spoken language normally. We must stay abreast of this important research, but we cannot be lulled into passive acceptance of a parallel developmental model.

A detailed response to some of Perlich's concerns seems to be warranted. It is argued by Perlich that the BCI suggestion of teaching two symbols such as HAPPY and SAD as an early pair of items is not appropriate due to their perceptual and directional similarities. Again, this suggestion is made by one instructor, not by the BCI and is cited in the Handbook as an example of one approach. As a symbol teacher of many years experience, I would concur with Perlich that this is the case for some individuals, but for others, the common conceptual base for HAPPY and SAD may prove an excellent reason for teaching them simultaneously.

Perlich, compares the grammatical categories represented by the initial Blissymbol lexicon (30 symbols, 1975) with that outlined for normal children. She suggests that the percentages in each class of Blissymbols be expanded to meet Nelson's categories. However, the reason for complying with Nelson's breakdown is not presented and appears to be based on a statistical exercise.

Further arguments are put forward questioning the introduction of body part symbols as a means of initial introduction to verbs. Perlich states that "since many symbol users are confined to wheelchairs (and they often don't move) they have difficulty in the comprehension of action or verbs." While I agree that many symbol users may have difficulty in performing the action of verbs, I would question that they have difficulty in comprehension of action. It is to a large extent because the physically handicapped have difficulty in experiencing action, that they should be encouraged early to have a means for interacting linguistically regarding actions.

Perlich's arguments regarding the introduction of various pronouns and nouns also seems based on an extraneous factor. She objects to the introduction of man and woman due to the sex-role stereotyping suggested by Mr. Bliss' explanation of the symbols. (Semantography, 1965) While I can relate to Perlich's concerns regarding this issue, I for one have rarely taught these symbols to a child using Mr. Bliss' rationale. There are many creative and meaningful techniques for introduction of these symbols. (see Warrick; Blissymbols for Preschool Children, 1982.) To reject symbols as important to the child as MAN and WOMAN and later MOTHER and FATHER is to lose sight of the goal of Blissymbols -- alternate communication.

Although there are many other points with which one could argue, I believe it is unnecessary to address them all in the Newsletter. A sensitive and knowledgeable instructor who is able to evaluate normal language development and relate it to the individual child will have no problems with initial lexicons.

The BCI has never suggested a fixed sequential order for symbol instruction. Since 1978, with the introduction of the Blissymbol stamps, vocabulary selection and organization on an individual bases has been reinforced through materials designed for this purpose. Guidelines only are offered through BCI publications and training curriculum. (McNaughton, Norris, Parnes, 1979).

We at ACS and BCI continue to encourage vocabularies and instruction directed toward the individual needs of the user.



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## PASSPORT TO FREEDOM

By: Jane Green  
St. John's, Newfoundland

In January and February 1982 I had the good fortune to work at Ontario's Augmentative Communication Service in the Ontario Crippled Children's Centre. My job was mainly to offer programme support to established symbol users who were in-patients at the Centre. This included making an assessment of symbol usage, making recommendations and, inevitably, assembling with the user a new display.

One Friday afternoon, with a family coming to collect a young symbol user after three weeks' stay at the Centre, I was checking out the new display:

Special blocks completed? -  
Mini-displays? -  
All mac-tacked etc.? -

All O.K., and then, after the meeting with parents and teachers, the goodbyes - "Take care - Keep in touch - Good luck".

Suddenly I was transported back nearly forty years to another temporary job - this time during the Second World War. In a dingy London office, "Wish him good luck", I said, as I handed over the well-checked papers - the forged passport, ration card etc., all specially dirtied by cigarette ash to look old and used. They were for a young man who was to be dropped that night as an agent behind enemy lines. The moon was right. Would my involvement with his papers help or hinder him to function safely within alien territory?

How many similarities are there between the two situations, beyond the pang and the good-byes?

How alien in fact is the territory the symbol user frequents? As symbol users everywhere grow up and go out into the world, we need to think seriously about certain aspects of their preparation for life.

The agent had been well prepared. He knew how to behave in the milieu he was entering, as well as having been drilled in his special tasks. Could we not also use role play to prepare symbol users for different situations or confrontations in society? For example - 'a symbol user has his display on the counter and is waiting to be served, but the assistant continues to ignore him. What does he do?' Some symbol users might like the idea of a flashing lapel pin saying, 'PLEASE SERVE ME NEXT' !

The agent would find an underground network of supporters in occupied territory. Similarly the symbol user should find a network of trained symbol people who are ready to give him and his family and teachers a helping hand. Keeping an up-to-date and available list of all people in a certain area who are Bliss trained, should be a priority of Resource Centres.



The agent had been trained to realise, also, that in the last resort he had to rely on his own initiative. Something along the lines of a Dale Carnegie course, 'How to win friends and influence people', might help some of the more timid Blissymbol users.

All Bliss people need to join together to fight the enemy - Ignorance. Symbol users out and about are the very best propaganda. Let us support them and infiltrate enemy lines by the use of all forms of media. Teledon is coming, but we also have newspapers, radio and television - and example. "I noticed you talked to her as if she understood", said an onlooker of an exchange between a symbol user and friend, three months after the event.

If we work at it, we can help a Bliss display to become a true 'passport to freedom'.

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### SYMBOL DISPLAYS

From: R. Alan Currie  
Victoria, B.C.

Two new symbol displays have recently been made by instructors at our Greater Victoria Blissymbolics Resource Centre (see photographs).

Valerie's board was made by Denise Chow and Lou's by Leslie Cook. Our consultant, Sandy Wrightman, advised on the design and manufacture of both displays.

We have available for sale a 9-pocket folding display case. Prices are \$4.00 for a plain case and \$5.00 for case with velcro fastener and clip.

Details on the manufacture of these symbol displays and items for sale are available from:-

Greater Victoria Society for Alternate Communication  
#420-620 View Street  
Victoria, B.C. V8W 1J6

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Valerie's Blissymbol board has over 1,100 Blissymbols which she is able to point to using her right index finger. The three paneled board is hinged and symbols are placed on five sides of the panels. Valerie is also able to pull her board from its resting position at the left side of her electric wheel chair and open the hinged panels by herself.

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Lou's Blissymbol board is moved from its resting position at the side of her wheel chair and set in place by the person with whom Lou is conversing. Lou's board has over 320 Blissymbols placed into six color-coded sections. Lou indicates her symbols using an eye pointing system: She looks first to one of the six sections, then to one of four color bars around the perimeter of the board then to a pair of numbers. If Lou wants to tell someone her name, for example, she would look to Section A, the color yellow, the number 1 and the number 2.



Photos by

Paul Alcala





## A COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS GIFT

By: Paul Theriault  
Ridgetown, Ontario

(Paul Theriault is a Ridgetown resident and special education teacher. He kindly responded to my queries concerning the production and financing of his book "The Christmas Story" and excerpts appear below. Paul is currently translating five more chapters to complete "The Jesus Story" and then plans to adapt "Romeo and Juliet" ... Ed.)

Just over three years ago I attended a P.T.A. meeting in which Sharron Ready, a Bliss instructor at Southwestern Regional Centre gave what I thought was a very moving presentation. I felt most impressed when Sharron showed me what a girl called Barbara had written about Christmas. Barbara, like so many others, had been silent for the first twenty years or so of her life and only knew institution life. I found her impressions of Christmas quite heart warming. Later I asked Sharron what reading materials were available to these children and adults. She told me that there was very little around, and so that night I decided that I would work on books for them. My original plan was to translate the Parables. Three years later, through a revision and modification of plans, I presented the "Christmas Story". And naturally, the first book is dedicated to Barbara who so impressed me three year ago.

Barbara's impressions as expressed in Blissymbolics to her instructor Sharron Ready - 1979:

"What is Christmas? It is all about a man with a Bible and His family. Mary had a baby in a stable. Happy they were to see Him. She said that He will help all people to be happy. They would not get angry. He was God's son. Friends talked about the baby and they came to see Him and to touch Him. He was Jesus. Why people not listen to Jesus?"

Barbara

The summer following that presentation I did a great deal of translating. I wrote to Charles Bliss and met with him in Toronto where we had an interesting discussion on Judeo-Christian views. Some problems arose and I left his hotel room feeling a little discouraged and, for a while, abandoned my efforts. There followed more thought and prayers from someone who desperately wanted to do what was right. I then resumed my translation efforts, this time breaking down the Jesus Story into six specific areas, beginning with the Christmas Story. Sharron Ready made mention of my project to the people at B.C.I., and thus I met Jinny Storr. Jinny was most encouraging and sensitive. The project was on again.

Finally in October of 1981 I began approaching the Service Clubs with my idea. The last chapter had yet to be completed, and Jinny had not as yet given a final proof-reading approval. And I had no money. Needless to say, it was a time of great emotion because of my strong desire to produce the book by Christmas. Prayers were certainly warranted and expressed with much feeling.

The very first Service Club I went to, The Kinsmen, were so taken by the idea that they offered to sponsor the whole production! I couldn't believe it. I had come home after the presentation and discussed it with Liz and both of us were trying to analyse the situation. Then at 10:00 o'clock I received a phone call saying they wanted me back at their meeting hall. They then made their offer. I told them I didn't feel right about asking so much (\$6000) from such a small club; so they told me to go ahead and talk to the other clubs and organizations and they would make up the difference. What a crew!

And so for the next two months I went from Club to Club, and by this time everyone knew all about the project. Everyone was quite generous and more than enough money was raised.

While speaking at Turin United Church, I was nearing the end of my presentation. I had become quite accustomed to my "script" and all was going smoothly, I could feel that everyone in attendance was with me. My little jokes were going over, and so forth. Then came the time to present the first book to the Aunt and Uncle of Carol Sue, a Bliss user. For a moment there, I lost my cool. So much had happened so quickly to finally make that presentation possible. I don't remember exactly what I said to Carol Sue's Aunt and Uncle, but I'm quite sure it wasn't too coherent.

I also want you to know that production costs for the project were lowered by the United Church Women's group who volunteered hours of service in the "gathering" process of the production. As well, the workers at Bookshelf Bindery drove books to several points in Ontario at no cost. My lawyer did his work for free and many more people participated to ensure that we could "pull it off". And so I'm sure you understand my presentation on page one - "This book is a gift from the People of Ridgetown and area."

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#### Community Participants:

Kinsmen  
Optimists  
Kiwanis  
Rotarians  
United Church Women  
Volunteer Firemen

IODE  
Catholic Women's League  
Kinettes  
Disciples of Christ  
Canadian Legion  
Numerous Individuals



By: Mary Losoncy  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Developmental Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma is a facility which currently serves 138 multihandicapped children. The students are served in wings of four public schools and a medical center. Because several of the most physically handicapped children experienced phenomenal success with Blissymbolics, the Developmental Center staff received many requests for more information about Blissymbolics. In an effort to help address the need, the Center became a BCI affiliate.

The Developmental Center has provided many short inservice sessions on Blissymbolics this year. Presentations have been made to parents, new staff members, volunteers, paraprofessionals, teachers, therapists, and local service clubs. In April, 1981, Developmental Center hosted an Elementary Blissymbol Workshop. The senior presenter was Shirley McNaughton. It was a wonderful experience to hear the history of Blissymbolics from Shirley herself.

Our major goal for this year has been to familiarize the community with access systems for nonvocal communication. We have hosted several short inservices on technology and tried to borrow and loan the technology available so nonvocal persons could try it out. On April 16th - 17th, 1982, the Resource Center co-sponsored a symposium on nonvocal technology with Tulsa Rehabilitation Center and the University of Tulsa.

One of our typical symbol users is Brian, age 10, who sustained brain damage at four months when he was an interrupted crib death. He uses symbols placed on his tray and on a Zygo Communication System. Brian knows many more symbols than he is able to access. We are currently trying him on smaller symbols than he had previously been using. He is doing well so far, and we hope to be able to get an electronic access system recessed in his tray in the near future.

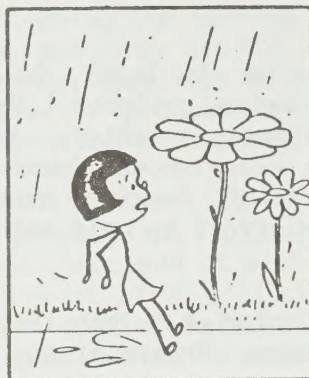
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ⓑ indicates - 1) a symbol which differs from the C. K. Bliss version either in symbol form or accompanying wording, or 2) a new BCI symbol authorized in the absence of requested comment from C. K. Bliss.

Material from symbol users is reproduced essentially as submitted in order to reflect individual creativity and different styles for expression or instruction. Neither symbols nor usage are to be regarded as models for expression or instruction.

The symbol composition and drawing have been updated to conform to Blissymbols For Use.

# A Pretty Umbrella



Write the story.

Who:

Verb:

What:

For:

Where:

who

? |

action  
indicator

^

what thing

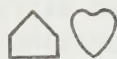
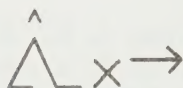
? □

where

?



(Liz)



(George)



(Veronique)



(Everyone)

(submitted by Ottawa Crippled Children's Centre)





